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LETTER TO A FRIEND,

BY

JOHN G. PALFREY,

A REPRESENTATIVE FROM MASSACHUSETTS IN THE THIRTIETH CONGRESS.

“Let all the ends thou aim’st at be thy Country’s,
Thy God’s, and Truth’s.”

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THE following was all in type, and awaiting only the last proof corrections to be struck off, on the 29th of July, when I learned that, in consequence of the death of Mr. King, and the transfer of Mr. Winthrop to the Senate, the Governor would order elections in the First and Second Districts, and might include the Fourth. As my position referred to in the second paragraph of the Letter was thus liable to be changed, (as in fact has proved to be the case,) I have suspended the printing to the present time. The tenth trial for an election in this District takes place to-day. The sheets will go to the printer before night, for the press.

August 19th.

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LETTER.

Cambridge, July 20th, 1850.

MY DEAR FRIEND : —

I WAS much gratified by the manner in which you spoke of my course in political life, when we met this week at the College Commencement, the first time for several years. Others of my former pupils and friends, who, like you and myself, have belonged to the Whig party, took the same occasion to express their sympathy and continued confidence, in highly satisfactory terms.

The week before last, an official publication was made of the returns of votes given at the last trial for a Representative in Congress from the Fourth Congressional District. As it is understood that the Governor has this week left town without appointing another day for an election, I infer that it is not his intention to do so till the autumn, when it is altogether uncertain whether I shall be a candidate. Accordingly, I feel at liberty to break the silence which I have hitherto thought proper to maintain in respect to some of the strictures to which you referred as having been passed upon my conduct.

I desire to do so for two reasons. I am not insensible to the disapprobation of many who have misunderstood, or even of some who have maligned me ; and I venture to hope that, in the satisfaction of their success, those who have opposed my reelection will be inclined to judge of my representations with somewhat more of candor, and that passion and prejudice will have less sway than it would be reasonable to expect during an exciting contest. At all events, I have children, to whom my good name is dear, and to whom it will continue to be so when I shall be no longer here to defend it. I would have them prepared to show, that, as far as the matters in question are concerned, they have no occasion to blush for their parentage.

I may name yet another motive, which you will fully appreciate. I have been a Christian minister. Numbers, yet living, listened to me, and gave me their affectionate confidence, while, year after year, I endeavoured to enforce the principles of a lofty Christian morality. I will not have it allowed, without a protest, that I was utterly unworthy of that confidence so gratefully remembered ; I will not, if I can help it, allow any good influence that in former times I may have exerted over their minds to be annulled by the belief, — inculcated in the assaults that have been made upon me, — that he who urged on them the claims of truth and righteousness has ceased to “reck his own rede.”

I shall make no apology for egotism in what I am about to write. I must speak constantly of myself, for my object is self-vindication.

I must begin a long way back, though not a step further back than my humble history has been ransacked by the newspaper writers for matter with

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which to upbraid me. Taking advantage of the unfavorable feeling which exists in our community respecting a withdrawal from the clerical profession, and presuming that, in a matter so delicate and private, I should be unwilling to make explanations, they have not shrunk from using the grossest freedom in their inquisition into my earlier course.

In the year 1831, after thirteen years' service in the parochial ministry in Boston, I accepted a Professorship in the Theological Department of the University, and removed to Cambridge. My partial friends in the religious society with which I had been connected objected to my taking that step, and urged that it was not wise. But no doubt of its being taken under a disinterested sense of duty ever reached me from any quarter. My position had been every thing that heart could desire, and never more attractive, to say the least, than when I relinquished it. Separating myself from relatives and friends, I left it for a place, — to be retained, as I supposed, for the rest of my life, — where I was to have more labor, less leisure, less compensation, and social position and advantages certainly not superior to what I left behind. Except that I was not in ill health, I took the step under the same circumstances as the same step had been taken just before by the late Rev. Dr. Ware, jr., and I never heard that he was charged with being prompted by political, or any other worldly ambition.

After four years, with a view to add to my pecuniary means, which proved unequal to the wants of an increased family, I became editor of the *North American Review*. I am ashamed to write of matters of such purely personal concern, but the impudent and false constructions put upon them by those who have felt justified in criticizing so distant a period of my life, compel me to the unwelcome task. At the end of four years more, namely, in 1839, my situation was this: — During five days and a half of every week of the College terms, I was doing harder and more exhausting work, in the lecture-room, and in preparation for it, than I have ever done in any other way. I was one of the three preachers in the University Chapel; and during my turn of duty, in what remained of Saturday after the week's lecturing was done, I had to prepare for the religious service which I conducted on Sunday. As Dean (or executive officer) of the Theological Faculty, I was charged with affairs of administration in that department of the University. As editor of the *North American Review*, I was under obligation to lay before the public two hundred and fifty or more closely printed octavo pages every quarter. I had in press a work, of some extent and labor, on the Hebrew Scriptures. And (imprudently, perhaps, but for apparently sufficient cause) I had engaged to deliver and print courses of lectures for the Lowell Institute, which accordingly I did deliver in 1839–40, and the two following winters.

These things united made a task too great for the health and strength of most men. At all events, it was too great for mine. Plain indications showed that I must have some relief, or be crushed, body and mind. My permanent engagements were the professorship in the University, and the editorship of the *Review*. In the *Review* was embarked a large capital (for me); and to dissolve my connection with it, until there should be an opportunity for an advantageous sale, was not to be thought of, because this would have been to put it out of my power to reimburse the friends to whom I was indebted for the investment. I did not desire to resign my professorship. Nor did I yet contemplate such a movement. My plan was to obtain such

relief as seemed absolutely necessary, and no more, by a dispensation from a portion of its duties. A recent event had put it in my power to relinquish a part of my income from that source. I accordingly made a communication to the Corporation of the College, proposing to give up the less important part of my duties, (and with them three eighth-parts of my salary,) and submitting a plan by which I thought they might be executed at less expense to the institution, and without derangement of the system of the department. The Corporation, after conference with me by a committee, and consultation among themselves, acceded to my proposal, and passed a vote accordingly. A copy was transmitted to me, and the transaction was complete.

A few days passed, and the President called upon me to give me information, which, as he very properly said, he thought I ought to possess. He told me that, at a subsequent meeting of the Corporation, more full than those at which my proposal had been considered and acted on, dissatisfaction had been expressed with the arrangement on the part of members who had been absent, on grounds having reference to the general policy of the College, and the inexpediency of precedents of this nature. His communication was limited to giving me this information, without any suggestion that further action was expected from me, or was contemplated by the Corporation, in the way of a reversal of what had taken place. But it cost little reflection to show me that I could not with propriety take advantage of a vote which it appeared would not have been passed in a full board against such opinions of a minority. It was equally clear that I must not think of going on as I had done. Accordingly, on a revision of the whole subject, I announced my intention to resign at the end of the academical year. This was done with perfect good feeling on both sides, of which feeling towards myself the most flattering evidence was afforded in documents placed in my hands by the authorities of the College. I did not remain in Cambridge, where I had lived eight years, as, according to the theory lately broached of my movements, I should have done, to pursue objects of political ambition. I removed in the autumn to Boston, advertising my house in Cambridge to let, which was effected in the summer of the next year. — And this is the whole story of my separation from the College, an event unexpected and undesired by me, and connected with no ulterior views beyond the preservation of my life and health. My object in it has been preposterously misrepresented. There is not a shadow of proof, nor have I any recollection or belief, that I had then any more thought of a course of life like that into which unexpected circumstances have since led me, than I now have of becoming some day Emperor of China.

Having lived in Boston two years, engaged in my studies, in the management of the *North American Review*, and in the preparation and publication of my Lectures before the Lowell Institute, not writing a line for any newspaper, nor seeking political associations of any kind, nor thinking of politics more than every tolerably well-informed person, with whatever pursuits, may be supposed to do, I was elected by my fellow-citizens of that place to represent them in the General Court of the Commonwealth, for the years 1842 and 1843. It has been said and printed, that, by way of introducing myself to political life, I became a frequent attendant at the primary meetings, after my removal to Boston. To the best of my knowledge and belief, I never was in a primary meeting till after I had taken my seat as Representative in the General Court. To the best of my knowledge and belief, I never was in a

primary meeting but three times in my life ; namely, on the 6th of January, and the 31st of August, 1842, at Boston, and on the 21st of September, 1847, at Cambridge. To the best of my knowledge and belief, no solicitations — not so much as any hint — from me led to my nomination for the General Court. If any one supposes that he knows any thing to the contrary of this, I desire him to make it public.

Though I took a part in other measures, — for the responsibility of a Representative was upon me, — my regular business in the House was that of chairman of the Committee on Education, a place assigned to me without the slightest motion (and, I will add, without the slightest expectation) of my own. It was a place, however, I suppose, not unsuitable for a person of my habits, as it has been repeatedly filled by clergymen before and since. And it procured me a pleasure of the choicest kind. With others of that committee, I was subsequently placed on a special joint committee, to whom were referred the subject of the continuance of Normal Schools (the first provision for only three years having then expired), and a proposal for the establishment of School District Libraries. The committee determined that Resolves should be reported to continue the Normal Schools, and establish the Libraries ; that they should be introduced in the House, and that I should prepare and take charge of them in that body. Under circumstances of no little difficulty, these were carried through, and became a law on the 3d day of March, 1842. I look back upon that day as the date of the most useful public service I ever rendered, excepting only the day of my first vote in the Congress of the United States.

In 1843, by reason of straitened circumstances, (the cause of which there is no need to explain, but which were not such then, or at any other time, as to occasion to any person the loss of a cent by me,) I disposed of the property, and relinquished the editorship, of the *North American Review*, which, as things stood, was inadequate to my needs, and looked about for some more advantageous employment of my time. Should it be asked why, released from other engagements, I did not seek to resume my former profession, there are those who will understand why one should be reluctant to return to that profession, when relinquished, as a resource for a livelihood. From time to time, as opportunity has occurred, I have freely given other reasons, in my judgment of great weight, and am always ready to do so, to any one who has a curiosity upon the subject. I shall probably be thought to have already thrown off reserve quite sufficiently as to these personal matters, without going further now on this point. I will but add, that since retiring from the University, in 1839, I have published three octavo volumes on important subjects in theology ; and I may hereafter lay before the public some further evidence that I have not forsaken the studies proper to the clerical profession, but, on the contrary, have devoted to them more time than the routine of parochial services would have allowed me to command.

In the spring of 1843, the lease of my house in Cambridge expired. As the reasons which had caused me to remove to Boston still remained in force, I tried through the whole summer to find another tenant, by advertising and in all the other usual ways ; but without success. For this simple reason, because I could not afford to hire one house while I owned another which was vacant, I moved back to Cambridge in November, 1843. But the newspaper construction of the proceeding (somewhat unmindful of chronolog-

ical congruities) was different: — “He saw that our District was unoccupied ground. A Whig, a true, honest, patriotic Whig, Benjamin Thompson, had been elected as our Representative in Congress. . . . It was well known that he was anxious to return to private life. . . . The Secretary moved from the city,” &c. — Mr. Thompson declined a reelection in 1846. He was first chosen in 1844. And “the Secretary,” who was not yet Secretary, moved from Boston to Cambridge in 1843.

The administration of the State government was changed by the result of the fall election of 1843, and it was understood that there would be a change in the office of Secretary of the Commonwealth. My desire to be considered a candidate having been made known to my friends, I was elected to that office by the General Court in the following January. I hope that in the four years I held it the Commonwealth received no detriment from me.

The duties of the Secretary’s office, of so different a description from the employment to which I had been accustomed, may well be supposed to have been found at first somewhat irksome and distasteful. But use and method made them easy, and not unpleasant. If not very interesting or intellectual, they were at all events not at all exhausting; and by method and diligence I found myself able to perform them with exactness within such a daily allowance of time as to leave considerable leisure for more congenial pursuits. The emolument, joined to my private resources, was enough to enable me to live with frugal comfort, and educate my children. In short, I was living very satisfactorily, and desired nothing different. But so it was not ordered.

Though, while a Representative in the General Court, I had been sent as a delegate from Boston to the Whig State Convention in September, 1842, and though I made two or three speeches in the Presidential contest of 1844 (the annexation of Texas being already a pending question), it was in the autumn of 1845 that I first became connected in any material way with political transactions. If I mistake not, that was a time when Christian man or Christian minister might well think that it did not misbecome him to take an interest in public affairs. For my part, I am most confidently of the opinion that the cause of truth and righteousness, of God and of man, demanded quite as much active service at that time in the popular assemblies as in the pulpits of the land.

In October of that year, at a Convention called in Cambridge of opponents to the annexation of Texas as a Slave State, I was appointed, in my absence and without my knowledge (but that is quite immaterial), a member of a committee there raised, called the Massachusetts Texas Committee, charged with inviting anew the attention of the people of the Commonwealth to that flagrant meditated wrong, and obtaining petitions to Congress with a view to arresting the further progress of the scheme. My principal agency as a member of this committee was in the preparation of a circular letter to the clergy of the Commonwealth, invoking their aid in behalf of the contemplated object. I was also a member of a sub-committee of three persons to solicit funds for circulating information and appeals on the subject, and collecting the names of petitioners. The result of the action of this committee was, that petitions with forty or fifty thousand signatures from Massachusetts were forwarded to Washington at the meeting of the Twenty-ninth Congress.

In the summer of 1846, my friend, Mr. Charles F. Adams, having assumed the editorship of the “Boston Whig,” I contributed to that journal a series of twenty-six numbers, entitled “Papers on the Slave Power.” They attracted

some attention, and were presently after collected in a pamphlet, which passed through three editions.

On the following September 16th, the chairman of the Whig Committee of the Fourth Congressional District called upon me, and requested my permission to allow my name to go before the District Convention, soon to meet, as a candidate for nomination as successor in the House of Representatives to Mr. Thompson, who had made known his intention to withdraw. I expressed my disinclination to accept the proposal, and stated some of my reasons. At his request, however, I consented to withhold a reply for a few days. On the 21st day of that month I wrote to him, positively declining the proposal. In this determination I never wavered. Representations were made to me, in conversation and writing, by leading gentlemen of the party, with a view to change my purpose; but my answers were uniform and decided. These applications were continued up to the evening before the Convention, when the gentleman who at its meeting was chosen President visited me at my house to urge a change of my resolution, and received the same reply.

I did not desire the place. I was resolved not to be a candidate for it. Various reasons were conclusive with my own mind, some of which I mentioned from time to time. And what added to their force at that particular juncture, and made me absolutely averse to the step, was the hostility which, in some hitherto friendly quarters, had been excited against me by the general tenor, and particularly by some passages, of my recent publication on the "Slave Power," and which there was plain reason to apprehend would assume a character still more painful, should I consent to become a candidate for the place in question.*

Notwithstanding these unequivocal and constantly repeated denials, known to every one who knew any thing about the matter, the Convention nominated me as the candidate of its party. The state of things was then changed; such an expression, under such circumstances, of confidence and of desire for my services, had its weight; and, after much and long hesitation, I yielded to the representations which were made to me, that, as a matter of public duty, I was bound to recede from my position. I am glad that I did not then know all the personal consequences which were involved in that decision. I fear that I might not have had spirit to encounter them; and then some approbation of my conscience, which I now possess, for duty since honestly performed, would have been lost.

* One little matter which gave great offence was, that, in commenting on the course of a distinguished gentleman of the Whig party, I had said, in the off-hand style of an ephemeral newspaper communication, that it was "hard to make a statesman out of a calico-merchant." I regret the expression, for it was not necessary to my argument, and it provoked a clannish wrath, that dreams not of being appeased, after having, like a troubled sea, cast up much mire and dirt. The paper was hastily written, and sent to the press with little time for expurgation. In the pamphlet reprint, I suppressed the offensive words. But, after all, what is there in them to raise such a transport of displeasure? All callings in private life, it is likely, have their tendencies — some of one kind, some of another — unfavorable to the wisest and loftiest political action. A large proportion of our political men are lawyers by profession, from which it might be inferred to be a prevailing sentiment among us, that a lawyer's training is eminently what a statesman needs. But Burke, who knew something about statesmanship, ventured to leave on record a different opinion. How many thousand times has it been said, in State Street and elsewhere, — how many thousand times, even, in reference to my humble self, — that "parsons make poor politicians." The remark may be flippant; — I incline to think it is; — but would it be dignified for the cloth to be fiercely ruffled by it from Barnstable to Berkshire?

At the first trial, in November, there was no choice, the votes of the Democratic and Liberty parties outnumbering those of my supporters. I was elected in the following month, a large number of the Liberty party having withdrawn their opposition.

I was a delegate from Cambridge to the Whig State Convention held at Springfield, September 29, 1847. Part of the resolutions reported for the adoption of that body, by a committee raised for the purpose, related to the course proper to be pursued by the Whigs of Massachusetts in respect to the Presidential election, then a year distant. One of them was as follows: —

“*Resolved*, — That, if this course of policy shall be rejected, and the war shall be prosecuted to the final subjugation or dismemberment of Mexico, the Whigs of Massachusetts now declare, and put this declaration of their purpose on record, — that Massachusetts will never consent that Mexican territory, however acquired, shall become a part of the American Union, unless on the unalterable condition, that ‘there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude therein, otherwise than in the punishment of crime.’ ”

Desiring to reduce this to something practical, I moved to amend the series by adding the following: —

“*Resolved*, — That the Whigs of Massachusetts will support no men for the offices of President and Vice-President of the United States, but such as are known by their acts, or declared opinions, to be *opposed to the extension of slavery*.”

This is what has been often called in the newspapers, “Mr. Palfrey’s resolution of ‘No union with slaveholders.’ ”

The amendment was opposed by Mr. Winthrop. It was defended by myself, and more ably by others; among others, very eloquently by Mr. William Dwight, of Springfield, who said, “You cannot vote for a candidate not known to be opposed to slavery extension; *it would be guilt*.”* The vote was taken after nightfall, when many of the western delegates had dispersed to their homes, and when it was difficult to count the members as they stood in their places, on a level floor, in a dimly-lighted room. The majority was declared to be against my amendment. Many said afterwards, — and among them some who belonged to the reported majority, — that if the count could have been made more accurately, the decision would have been reversed.† The Whig County Conventions met presently afterwards, and in the greater number of them, — including (if my memory serves me) nearly, if not all, the larger counties, except Suffolk, — this resolution was adopted either in terms or in tenor. It expressed what was then (namely, in the autumn of 1847) the sense of the *Whig party of Massachusetts*.

On the 4th evening of the following December, I arrived at Washington, to take my seat in the Thirtieth Congress of the United States, which was to meet on the 6th. Mr. Giddings of Ohio was waiting to receive me, and ac-

* I quote from memory; but words so uttered are not easily forgotten.

† On looking at a newspaper file, to verify the language of the first resolve quoted above, the following remark upon the resolve proposed by me strikes my eye. It is taken from the “Springfield Republican,” a Whig paper issued on the spot, and one of the most influential in the Commonwealth: — “We would have adopted it [Mr. P’s amendment] at once, as every way proper, and in the most perfect keeping with the resolutions as originally presented. And we have the most perfect assurance that such was, and is, the general sentiment of the Convention.”

accompanied me to my lodging. He informed me that, Mr. Vinton having declined the nomination for Speaker, Mr. Winthrop had been selected for that place by the Whig caucus, by a majority of votes over Mr. Caleb B. Smith, of Indiana. I asked him what was known of Mr. Winthrop's intended course in the appointment of committees. He said he knew nothing material upon the subject. I expressed briefly my anxiety in relation to it; the conversation passed to other topics; and we separated without so much as a reference on either part, so far as I remember, to any course of action to be pursued.*

I reflected duly on the subject, and determined on my course; and the next day, after going to church (the day was Sunday, a circumstance which some who have not regarded my proceeding as a work of mercy have not failed to make busy use of), I sketched a note to Mr. Winthrop, which I sent, having first taken it to show to Mr. Giddings, and made one or two slight alterations at his suggestion. Of that note, presently afterwards (with perfect propriety) published by Mr. Winthrop, the following is a copy, namely:—

Coleman's, Washington, Dec. 5th, 1847.

DEAR SIR,—

It would give me pleasure to aid, by my vote, in placing you in the chair of the House of Representatives; but I have no personal hopes or fears whatever to dictate my course in the matter, and the great consideration for me must be that of the policy which the Speaker will impress on the action of the House.

Not to trouble you with suggestions as to subordinate points, there are some leading questions on which it may be presumed you have a settled purpose. May I respectfully inquire, whether, if elected Speaker, it is your intention,—

So to constitute the Committees on Foreign Relations, and of Ways and Means, as to arrest the existing war.

So to constitute the Committee on the Territories, as to obstruct the legal establishment of slavery within any territory.

So to constitute the Committee on the Judiciary, as to favor the repeal of the law of February 12th, 1793, which denies trial by jury to persons charged with being slaves; to give a fair and favorable consideration to the question of the repeal of those Acts of Congress which now sustain slavery in this District; and to further such measures as may be within the power of Congress to remedy the grievances of which Massachusetts complains at the hands of South Carolina in respect to the treatment of her citizens.

I should feel much obliged to you for a reply at your early convenience, and I should be happy to be permitted to communicate it, or its substance, to some gentlemen who entertain similar views to mine on this class of questions.

I am, dear Sir, with great personal esteem,

Your friend and servant.

* One of the Boston editors published that it was within his knowledge that my opposition to Mr. Winthrop was arranged between me and my friends before I left home. I met him soon after at Washington, and told him how clearly he was mistaken. But what good did that do?—He could not have known how I should proceed. No human being knew. I did not know myself. I had not spoken to any person of any intention of mine in respect to the choice of Speaker, nor had any one given me advice, opinion, or (as far as I remember) so much as hint upon the subject.

That night, after eleven o'clock, I received the following reply : —

Washington, Coleman's Hotel, December 5th, 1847.

DEAR SIR : —

Your letter of to-day has this moment been handed to me.

I am greatly obliged by the disposition you express "to aid in placing me in the chair of the House of Representatives." But I must be perfectly candid in saying to you, that if I am to occupy that chair I must go into it without pledges of any sort.

I have not sought that place. I have solicited no man's vote. At a meeting of the Whig members of the House, last evening (at which, however, I believe, you were not present), I was formally nominated as the Whig candidate for Speaker, and I have accepted the nomination.

But I have uniformly said to all who have inquired of me, that my policy in organizing the House must be sought for in my general conduct and character as a public man.

I have been for seven years a member of Congress from our common State of Massachusetts. My votes are on record. My speeches are in print. If they have not been such as to inspire confidence in my course, nothing that I could get up for the occasion, in the shape of pledges or declarations of purpose, ought to do so.

Still less could I feel it consistent with my own honor, after having received and accepted a general nomination, and just on the eve of the election, to frame answers to specific questions, like those which you have proposed, to be shown to a few gentlemen, as you suggest, and to be withheld from the great body of the Whigs.

Deeply, therefore, as I should regret to lose the distinction which the Whigs in Congress have offered to me, and through me to New England, for want of the aid of a Massachusetts vote, I must yet respectfully decline any more direct reply to the interrogatories which your letter contains.

I remain, with every sentiment of personal esteem,

Your friend and servant,

ROBERT C. WINTHROP.*

HON. J. G. PALFREY, &c., &c.

Three trials for the election of Speaker took place at the opening of the House the next morning. I voted for Mr. Hudson in all. On the third, Mr. Tompkins of Mississippi, and Mr. Holmes of South Carolina, who had before voted for other candidates, withheld their votes, and Mr. Winthrop was chosen by a majority of one.

* As to the intimation in the last paragraph but one of this note, that I had applied for something "to be shown to a few gentlemen, and to be withheld from the great body of the Whigs," it would be too captious a criticism to interpret it as an *argumentum ad invidiam*. But it was entirely gratuitous, and I suppose fell dead, for I did not hear a lisp from any one, during the time that I remained in Congress, that my application was thought exceptionable on any such grounds, though some thought it inconsistent with my previous course in declining to answer questions put to me. I desired permission from Mr. Winthrop to communicate his reply, should he make one, to some friends, whom I believed to be desirous like myself to be acquainted with his sentiments, and for the same reasons. This was no restriction (the supposition is absurd) on his own perfect liberty to inform all the world of his purposes. Had he seen fit to inform me, of course he might have said, Tell them to your friends ; and not only that ; tell them to every body else. Or he might have proclaimed them himself. I proposed to him no concealment. He knows I did not. And I will not be so unjust to him as to insinuate that he meant to imply the contrary.

In the elections which followed, of servants of the House, I voted for the persons who proved to be chosen; namely, for Mr. Campbell of Tennessee as Clerk, Mr. Sargent of Pennsylvania as Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Horner of New Jersey as Doorkeeper, and Mr. Johnson of Virginia as Postmaster. All of these gentlemen were candidates of the Whig party, except Mr. Johnson, who was a Democrat.

My opposition to the election of Mr. Winthrop to the Chair of the House occasioned a furious clamor, especially in Boston. In the papers of that city, there were suggestions of the propriety of an "indignation meeting" in the Fourth District; but it was ascertained, I believe, that the feeling of the District was not favorable to the project, and it was abandoned.

I withheld my vote from Mr. Winthrop as Speaker, under the persuasion that he would be governed in the administration of that office by a policy, in my judgment, and in that of those who had commissioned me to act for them, adverse to the honor and welfare of the country. The Speaker is not merely the officer presiding over the deliberations of the House. By his high prerogative in the appointment of the committees, to whom all matters of public business are referred in their earliest stage, he exerts on the action of the House an influence in all cases very material, and in a large proportion of cases no less than decisive. Without imputation upon Mr. Winthrop's integrity, I believed his views in relation to the great question of the day to be such that I could not, without a sacrifice of my own integrity, help to intrust him with that power. He was no representative of the principles which had been solemnly affirmed by the Whigs who sent me to Congress. I believed that he would take care to place the business of the House in the hands of committees who would do nothing to arrest the nefarious Mexican war then raging, and who would do no justice to the great questions then and now before the nation, relating to the abominations of the Slave Power, existing and meditated.

I might have been mistaken. The event might have shown my apprehensions to be groundless. This would have convicted me of an erroneous judgment. It would not have absolved me from the obligation of voting as I did, while my conviction remained what it was.

But was I mistaken? Did the event refute me? What was the complexion of the committees appointed by the Speaker presently after his accession to the chair?

The jurisdiction of the great question of the then flagrant war with Mexico belonged to the Committees on Foreign Affairs and of Ways and Means. Not a member of the former Committee was publicly known to be in favor of arresting the war. At its head was Mr. Smith of Connecticut. Let me say very little of Mr. Truman Smith. Let me but ask whether any one dreams that a committee with such leading would be under special advantages for harmonizing with the moral sense of the country on a great question of national justice and honor.

The Committee of Ways and Means was so constituted as to promise to the administration every facility in the way of funds to carry on the war. With the exception of Mr. Hudson of Massachusetts and Mr. Hubbard of Connecticut, no one who knew the men imagined that there would be any action on their part to arrest the plans of conquest then in prosecution.

The Committee which looked better than any other on paper was that on

the Territories. If at the time of its appointment Mr. Winthrop thought, as the public did, that it would use its power efficiently for freedom, then Mr. Winthrop, like the public, by and by found out his mistake. He may have known better than the public what to expect; but I have no right to suppose it.

Of the nine members of the committee on the District of Columbia, four were from the Slave States; one was a Northern Democrat, who had always, I believe, voted with the South on the questions connected with slavery; a sixth, a Whig of Ohio, was reputed to be an owner of slaves in Maryland; and of the remaining three, one was Mr. F. A. Tallmadge of New York.

At the head of the Judiciary Committee was Mr. Joseph R. Ingersoll, of Philadelphia, a very estimable gentleman in private life, but notoriously "Southern in all but latitude." Mr. Ingersoll, with three gentlemen from the South, and Mr. John L. Taylor, constituted the majority of that Committee.

I repeat the question, Was it for me, holding the opinions I did hold, representing the constituency I did represent, — was it for me virtually to vote for such committees, by voting the Speakership, with the power of appointment, to Mr. Winthrop, when I believed that he would appoint such committees?

Mr. Winthrop knew his men. They did their work as was expected, — all except the Committee on the Territories, who did not do their work as favorably for freedom as was probably anticipated by both sides. Neither the Committee on Foreign Affairs nor that of Ways and Means did any thing to put a stop to the war. The sluggish action of the Committee on the Territories in relation to the organization of governments in Oregon, California, and New Mexico, placed that series of measures at great disadvantage. Numerous petitions for the repeal of the law of Feb. 12th, 1793, and for legal protection for our colored citizens visiting Southern ports, (among them, petitions with thousands of signatures, presented by myself, so that I know their history,) were referred to the Committee on the Judiciary. Every one of them was buried outright. Numerous petitions for the abolition of slavery at the seat of government went to the Committee on the District. Not one of them was ever heard of more. Had they been made the subject of adverse reports, their friends could have been heard upon them in the House. As it was, no consideration could be had of them. They were smothered. They were smothered by the hands that the Speaker had empowered. If Mr. Winthrop thought that this was the proper business of the committees, he did properly to constitute them accordingly. But, as I did not think so, it was not right that he should be placed in a position so to constitute them, by the help of any vote of mine.

I was charged on this occasion with voting against my party. What party elected me to Congress? I was chosen by votes thrown to the number of a few hundreds by Liberty Party men, but chiefly by those of Whigs. My small number of Liberty Party supporters of course did not want me to vote into power such committees as Mr. Winthrop proceeded to appoint; and the Convention of Whigs of Middlesex, on the day of my nomination, had passed a resolution declaring their anti-slavery "principles and purposes," and their purpose to adhere to them "at any political hazard." *

* The Whig Convention which nominated me, held at Concord, October 6, 1846, and consist-

My views on this class of questions were perfectly well known to the Whigs who voted for me. These views had been announced, in language as explicit and decided as I was capable of using, in the pamphlet on the "Slave Power," which I had published during the preceding summer. It had been extensively read in the District, and, if I was correctly informed at the time, was circulated among the electors during the canvass, at the expense of the Whig District Committee. Nothing could be more notorious and unquestionable than was my position on that subject. The Whigs perfectly well knew by what principles I should be governed, when they gave me their votes. At least, they perfectly well knew by what principles I *said* I should be governed. A number of Whigs refused to vote for me for that reason. They did not like my antislavery principles. I thank them for their open hostility. It implied at least that they thought I would be as good as my word. I am much more flattered by their view of the subject than by that which afterwards appeared to have been taken by those Whigs who complained of me because, when in Congress, I acted up to the professions I had made when they sent me to it. It seems they thought I would do as so many before me had done, — talk one way before election, and act another way after. I do not feel honored by the compliment they paid me. If that was their expectation, I thank Heaven they mistook their man.

But I "hazarded a Democratic organization of the House." I did no such thing. But suppose I had, let any man capable for one moment of letting

ing of ninety-one delegates, from thirty-five towns, *unanimously* passed the following resolve, viz. : —

"*Resolved*, — That the Whigs of District No. 4, whose battle-grounds are consecrated with the blood of those who perilled their lives in defence of that sacred charter of our liberties, which declares that all men are born free and equal, can recognize no condition of human existence but that of personal freedom, and that consequently we are determinedly opposed to every act of the national government which has for its object, or can have for its effect, the perpetuation and extension of the institution of slavery. That we protest against the admission into this Union, or the annexation to these States, either by conquest or treaty, of any new slave territory; that we utterly condemn the annexation already consummated, and the disgraceful war which has followed in its train."

The Whig County Convention for Middlesex was held at the same place on the same day. The following were part of its resolves, viz. : —

"*Resolved*, — That the Whigs of Massachusetts have had enough of compromises.

"*Resolved*, — That the war of invasion and conquest, entered upon for the support and defence, and prosecuted for the extension, of slavery, is an enormous crime; that the Executive war with Mexico, the first-fruits of the annexation of Texas, can be justified by no reason 'which does not deserve the scorn of man and the judgments of Heaven,' and that to its commencement, its support, and its continuance we are uncompromisingly opposed.

"*Resolved*, — That believing it to have become the avowed and settled policy of the national government to foster, strengthen, and extend the institution of Slavery, and that the rights of the Free States, as well as the fundamental principles of republican liberty, are thereby endangered, the Whigs of the North are bound in duty to make the declaration, that they are to be now and henceforth regarded as the decided and uncompromising opponents of Slavery; that they are opposed to its farther extension, and to its continuance where it already exists; that they will concur in all constitutional measures to abridge its limits, and promote its abolition; and that to these their principles and purposes they will adhere *at any political hazard*.

"*Resolved*, — That as, upon every question involving the extension, the interests, and the existence of Slavery, there is 'but one party' in the Slaveholding States, it is alike the policy and the duty of the Free States to exhibit upon every such question a corresponding unanimity, and that only in this way is there any hope of arresting the progress of the Slave Power toward a monopoly of the benefits, and an absolute control of the destinies, of our National Union."

See note at the end, p. 27.

alone words and attending to things, show me what difference that would have made. Let any man, acquainted with the history of the Thirtieth Congress, point out to me any important division in that House according to the old party lines. The only question of any consequence that I remember, which brought into view the distinguishing doctrines of the two old parties, was one which came up in committee, Feb. 17, 1848, on Mr. Vinton's loan bill for sixteen millions of dollars. It was the old question between a direct loan, or an issue of treasury-notes; and upon that question I gave a Whig vote, which vote turned the scale on the Whig side, while Mr. Joseph R. Ingersoll, of Philadelphia, Mr. Winthrop's Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, voted with the Democratic party. I defy any man to show me how, in respect to any one of the old party questions, the action of that Congress, from its first day to its last, from Dec. 6, 1847, to March 4, 1849, would have been different in any particular had a Democratic Speaker occupied the chair. I affirm, without fear of contradiction, that, as to all the recognized topics of Whig and Democratic controversy, there was no policy of the House to indicate that the Democratic Mr. Davis of Indiana was no longer its presiding officer.

But, I repeat, I did by no means "hazard a Democratic organization of the House." The Democrats were not only a minority, but a minority disabled and nullified by divisions. There were anti-slavery and pro-slavery Democrats, Democrats in favor of, and opposed to, the policy of internal improvements, &c. They had no concert of action. Their vote for Speaker shows it. They scattered their votes on different candidates. As a party, they had no candidate. Their putting one of their number in the chair was out of the question. The question — had there in fact been a question, had there not been a foregone conclusion — was not at all between Mr. Winthrop and some Democrat, but between Mr. Winthrop and some other Whig. I knew, about as well as I ever pretend to know any thing future, that Mr. Winthrop would not be defeated. Suppose his defeat possible, the natural and probable course of things would be, that the Whig party would fall back upon Mr. Caleb B. Smith, who had had the second largest number of votes at the Whig caucus. The Whig votes which had been withheld from Mr. Winthrop would have been readily given for Mr. Smith, in whom the dissenting members placed more confidence; and he would accordingly have been elected. The same thing would have happened which occurred in 1843 in the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, when three or four votes, which had been refused to Mr. Kinnicut of Worcester, on account of his supposed proslavery bias, were given for his brother Whig, Mr. King of Danvers, and he was chosen.

But, I repeat yet again, there was not the smallest probability that Mr. Winthrop would be defeated. The slave interest was satisfied that, under the then existing circumstances, to place Mr. Winthrop in the chair was the best thing it could do; and place him there it would. I do not say that he would have been its first choice; but as things stood, his elevation was the most advantageous thing within its reach. It would have preferred to have Northern votes elect him Speaker, and then have for itself the benefit of his position. It would have preferred to avail itself of him for its purposes, and still have the privilege of growling at him, as a Northern man, for doing no more. But he was to be placed in the chair at all events. I was, and am, persuaded that, if the withdrawal of two Southern opposition votes had not been enough to elect Mr. Winthrop, five, — ten, — any reasonable number, — would have

been withdrawn, or even changed. I did not feel it to be any honor to Massachusetts to have a Massachusetts man do Southern work, and I had no mind to give my Massachusetts vote to bring about that consummation. My notion was, If South Carolina and Mississippi want Mr. Winthrop for Speaker, let South Carolina and Mississippi choose him. It is not for the Bay State to do that work for them. Accordingly, South Carolina and Mississippi did choose him. He obtained a majority, on the third trial, by the withdrawal of the opposing votes of Mr. Holmes and Mr. Tompkins.

Of those gentlemen who, by withdrawing their opposition, gave the Speaker's chair to Mr. Winthrop, the first-named was the Democratic representative from Charleston, South Carolina. How was it to be imagined that he and the Whig representative from the free Fourth District of Massachusetts should help each other to place in power the same Speaker, and, through the Speaker, the same committees? Would the committees, and, through them, the policy of the House, which Mr. Holmes was aiming at, probably be acceptable to my constituents? He wrote a letter on the subject. Let him speak for himself.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CHARLESTON MERCURY.

Washington, January, 1848.

SIR:—In an editorial article you have thought proper to condemn my refusal to vote on the third ballot against Mr. Winthrop; and you commence your essay by a remark, "That you had hoped that Mr. Holmes would have explained his course to his constituents."

As you have called upon me thus publicly for an explanation, I shall give it.

The Southern Whigs, opposed to the Wilmot Proviso, nominated Mr. Winthrop in caucus in opposition to a majority of the Northern Whigs, who were in favor of the Wilmot Proviso, and who opposed the nomination of Mr. Winthrop. Why this? Because Mr. Winthrop had been successful in defeating the Wilmot Proviso in the Massachusetts Whig Convention. This circumstance, I thought, was well calculated to attract the attention of Southern men. In addition to this, when the voting commenced in the House, the Abolitionists were found voting against Mr. Winthrop. My attention was arrested by the fact. I saw at once that the Abolitionists were playing in Congress the precise game so skilfully played in the States of New Hampshire and New York, namely, acting as a balance party, and, though small in numbers, contriving to control affairs. My attention being thus roused, I made inquiries of the precise mode of action by which the Abolitionists proposed to effect their object, and I did learn that they had proposed to Mr. Winthrop to vote for him as Speaker, provided he would give them the organization of the important committees,—the Judiciary, Territories, and District of Columbia,—upon Abolition principles, with a view to abolish slavery in this District, prevent its introduction into any new territory, repeal the act which compels the return of fugitive slaves, and defeat the law of my own State in relation to the entrance of colored persons within our limits. That Mr. Winthrop preferred to lose the Speakership rather than comply with these stringent demands. This fact was learnt during the progress of the third ballot.

The danger to me was manifest. The Democrats would not vote for a Whig, and therefore a Southern Whig could not be elected. The Northern

Whigs would not vote for a Democrat from the South, because, with a few exceptions, the Northern Whigs are opposed to slavery.

The Abolitionists would not vote for any Southern man, — be he Whig or Democrat. How, then, could the House be organized?

In one mode only: by the Northern and Wilmot Proviso men merging every consideration into Abolition, and electing an Abolitionist or Wilmot Proviso man upon the conditions proposed to, and rejected by, Mr. Winthrop.

I send you the correspondence between Mr. Palfrey and Mr. Winthrop. This correspondence will substantiate these facts; and now I ask, Ought I, with this knowledge, to have placed the organization of the house in the hands of the Abolitionists? Ought I, a sentinel on an outpost, to have hesitated, in an unexpected approach of danger, to defend the great, the by *far greatest* of all interests committed to me by a generous constituency? I did not hesitate. All party considerations faded before the deep, intense, burning necessity. I at once acted, acted promptly, and, I grant, decisively. Mr. Winthrop was elected, and the Abolitionists defeated.

The committees have been properly organized, and Mr. Palfrey, Mr. Giddings, and Mr. Tuck excluded from the important committees they were so anxious to control.

I have thus acted; and I have the satisfaction to know, that, when I explained the grounds on which I acted, I have the approval of those whose judgments I deem eminent upon such subjects. The times are full of perils, — perils to the country generally, — perils to the South emphatically. I act under a fearful responsibility. If, in the exercise of that responsibility, I have incurred the disapprobation of the editor of the Mercury, I regret it. It will certainly be pleasing if my explanation shall satisfy him. If not, I must submit with that meekness which ought always to characterize a representative.

Your obedient servant,

I. E. HOLMES.*

In the course of the voting, my colleagues, Mr. Ashmun and Mr. Rockwell, came to my seat with a message from Mr. John Quincy Adams, to the effect that Mr. Adams advised or requested me to forbear further opposition to Mr. Winthrop's election; and it has been thought to have been blameworthy in me that I did not alter my course accordingly. I will not stop to discuss the degree of obligation resting on a Representative in Congress to be governed, in the discharge of his trust, by the request of any person, however distinguished, out of his District or in it, — a member of the House or not. Mr. Adams's opinions and wishes were entitled to my most respectful consideration. How far was the expression of them voluntary in this instance? Others know. I do not. It has been stated, apparently by authority, that, "instead

* Mr. Cabell, of Florida, who voted for Mr. Winthrop, explained himself to his constituents in a letter, from which the following is an extract: —

"It is well known to those who are engaged in this unholy purpose to stir the blood and exasperate the feelings of the South on this delicate subject of slavery, that the object of the Abolitionists can be obtained, so far as the reference of their petitions is concerned, without a vote of the House, — simply by presenting them at the Clerk's table. They have been repeatedly so referred. The committees have in all cases reported them back to the House, and asked to be discharged from their consideration. This is the course approved by Mr. Winthrop."

of going himself to Mr. P., Mr. A. expressly *declined* doing so"; from which it is not unnatural to infer that Mr. Adams neither was the original proposer of the communication, nor entered warmly into it. Had what passed been in a personal interview instead of a message, I might have ventured to suggest to Mr. Adams some of those considerations which were controlling my own mind, and ask him how their force was to be done away; and, in reference to the letter which I had received the night before from Mr. Winthrop, I might have informed him that there was a part of the case upon which I was proceeding, as yet unknown to him. I might have said, "Here, Mr. Adams, is a letter, in which the candidate for the chair, declining to inform me more directly respecting his views, refers me to his votes and speeches as the proper sources of information upon the point, whether I should give him my vote. 'My votes are on record,' he says; 'my speeches are in print.' On the record of those votes which he bids me consider, I find the vote for the Mexican War Bill, on the 11th of May of last year. It is not for me to deny that he thought it his duty to give that vote, — that he considered it to be required by the interests and honor of the country, and the cause of justice and humanity, to let loose fifty thousand men, with all the enginery of destruction, upon Mexico, for a carnage so vast, so horrible, so unprovoked, for such an object. But being myself of the opposite opinion, rather than that I should have given that vote, it were good for me that I had not been born. Among the printed speeches to which Mr. Winthrop refers me, one of the last that I remember was that of last autumn in Faneuil Hall, in which he expressed no repentance for that vote, but, on the contrary, assumed its responsibility, and virtually defended it. And now he distinctly challenges me, by voting for him as Speaker, to express my approbation of his votes and speeches, — those very material ones among the rest. I know you are not the man that will advise me to do it." *

* A writer in the Charlestown newspaper gave the following account of the transaction: —

"The act is repeated. In that shrill voice the tones of vindictive triumph strike the ear. But, mark! the third and final trial is proceeding. See that venerable figure, bowing almost to that tomb which has now received him. Follow him through that anxious crowd, which instinctively and reverentially give way to 'the old man eloquent.' He approaches that strange Whig, whose voice for Charles Hudson — chagrined, provoked, as Mr. Hudson is at such an *honor* — he has just heard. No anger is on his brow, but sadness and kindness mark his expression. Let us catch the sounds of that voice, which never fell without weight upon a Massachusetts ear; for its utterance was ever that of independence, truth, wisdom. We may suppose, in accordance with the accounts of that memorable interview, which have never been contradicted or denied, and which it is too late now ever to contradict or deny, that its purport might have been this: — 'My friend, I pray you to trust to me this once. You doubtless mean well, but this is a new life for you. You are doing an act, the awful extent of the consequences of which no man can tell. You are in a position of the utmost moment, for on a change of your voice depends the choice of a Massachusetts or Ohio Whig, or a slave-owning Southerner and radical Locofoco, to the great committee of this House. You know me too well to doubt that I would not counsel you to any thing unbecoming a man, a Whig, an outspoken opponent of slavery. But in persisting in throwing your vote practically for the Locofoco candidate, you jeopardize your country, your party, yourself! I beseech you, as a personal favor, — a mark of private friendship, — that you would bury any feelings of individual enmity against Mr. Winthrop, which may be rankling in your bosom, and remember that in striking down him, by the power providentially in your hands, you prostrate Northern interests, peace, justice, human rights!' The venerable sage of Quincy turns aside in despair, for he is skilled enough in human experience, in drawing conclusions as to the working of the soul within

Soon after, I had a conversation with Mr. Adams on the subject. As I am the only witness to it, I shall say no more than that it was in the highest degree satisfactory to me.

Complaint was made, that, before giving my vote, I inquired of Mr. Winthrop how he intended to constitute the committees with reference to the questions of Slavery and War. It was represented as inconsistent and indecorous in me to take that step, inasmuch as, when called upon by the Liberty party, while a candidate for election as representative, to give pledges respecting my future action, I had declined to do so.

I cannot admit that there is any ground for such a censure, in either of its phases. When questions had been addressed to me, I had never dreamed of treating or of regarding that course as affrontive, or otherwise than as entirely respectful, on the part of the questioner. Any gentleman—such was and is my view—may properly ask questions, and any one, on his responsibility, may answer them, or decline to answer. As to which of these courses is preferable, different persons think differently, and the same persons think differently in respect to different occasions. The latter course had been adopted by me in respect to a communication from a committee of the Liberty party; it was perfectly right that it should be adopted by Mr. Winthrop, if he saw fit;—by both of us, of course, under the same condition; namely, that our refusal became a fact to be taken into account by the questioner in determining his own further action. On the other hand, I have answered questions. When a committee of the Liberty party asked me whether I should refuse to vote for a slaveholder for any office, I told them that I should not so refuse. I might add, though I do not care to lay any stress upon it, that the series of measures referred to in the questions addressed to me by the Liberty party was such, that, whenever canvassed in Congress, they would lead to much consideration and debate, to which the legislator should not preclude himself, by previous engagements, from giving a fair attention; whereas my questions to Mr. Winthrop related to an act solely his own, to be done within a few days, and of which the outline, if not most of the details, had no doubt been fully resolved upon in his own mind. He knew just as well, and as irrevocably, on the 5th day of December, the principles, policy, and plan on which he should constitute the committees, as he knew on the 13th, when the names were read from the Clerk's desk.

My votes for the Whig candidate for the place of Clerk, and for the Democratic candidate for the place of Postmaster, were both made subjects of censure. The candidate for the clerkship was Mr. Campbell of Tennessee. Just as the vote was to be taken, one of the Massachusetts delegation took pains to tell me that he understood that Mr. Campbell was not a slaveholder, apprehending, probably, that if I supposed otherwise it would deprive him of my vote. It would not have done so, however. Nor should I have asked the question. The position of Clerk is as different as possible from that of Speaker. Were he ever so much of a proslavery man, he would have nothing to do with the appointment of Committees, or have any similar power to influence the action of the House in conformity with his views upon that matter. On the other hand, I considered the office of Clerk to be so far

from the lineaments of the countenance without, to know that his counsel, not often uttered to unpersuaded ears among his friends, has fallen powerless."

This, however, was a mistake. I had no conference with Mr. Adams on that occasion.

one of a confidential nature, that it was proper that he should be a person harmonizing in political sentiment with the party in power in the House, and with its presiding officer. And I voted for Mr. Campbell in preference to his predecessor and competitor, Mr. French.*

When I went to Washington, I found Mr. Johnson in the humble place of Postmaster of the House of Representatives. He was the Democratic candidate for reelection. Whether he was a slaveholder, or not, I never asked, nor had, nor have I, the slightest care about it, except for his own sake. I asked a respected colleague of long experience in the House, whether Mr. Johnson was a capable and faithful officer. He replied that he had never heard any thing against him in either of these respects. I said, then I could not vote to supersede him. Other Whigs, — Mr. Houston of Delaware, Mr. Thibodeaux of Louisiana, — it seems, thought as I did. At all events, they gave the same vote. And yet other Whigs, whom I could name, purposely abstained from voting at all, with a view to give the choice to Mr. Johnson. I could have done no otherwise than I did in this instance, without a complete change of my views respecting the proper course of action in such cases. I did not consider myself as belonging to the party of “the spoils”; the party held together, as some one has said, by “the cohesion of public plunder.” My opinion was, that, while officers of that description that their opinions influence the management of public affairs should be taken from the party in power, because the majority has a right to have its will efficiently carried out, it is, on the other hand, no reason whatever for superseding a good ministerial officer, that he belongs to one or another political school; and the public good is not promoted, but damaged, by such a practice. I believed that such was the opinion of the Massachusetts men who sent me to Congress. Such was my opinion, and such my unrebuked practice, during the years that I was Secretary of the Commonwealth. In that capacity I employed a considerable number of clerks, without ever appointing or displacing one because of his being Whig or Democrat. The same appears to have been the view of my superiors at home, by association with whom I may naturally have been confirmed in it. The Governor and Council who came into office in 1844 found in the place of their Messenger a Democrat, recently appointed by their Democratic predecessors. He was a suitable person for the place, and, though much solicitation was made for it by mem-

* In the autumn of 1843, in a speech at Charlestown, I made both these statements, viz. : — 1st. That I was informed before the vote, by a colleague whom I named, that Mr. Campbell was not a slaveholder; but that, 2d. I should not have sought the information. nor did it influence my action, because, from the entirely different nature of the two offices, I had no such questions to raise in respect to a Clerk as I had in respect to a Speaker. On this occasion, a writer in the newspaper of that city took the very strong course of representing that I had stated Mr. Campbell not to be a slaveholder, and then insisting on what he called “the notorious, undenied, undoubted fact, that he was not only from a Slave State, but actually a slaveholder.” And to corroborate the latter assertion, he published a letter from Washington, in which the writer said, “There is in the office of Indian Affairs a gentleman of the name of Mullay, whose former residence was Tennessee, and, as I have been informed, he was a very near neighbour of Col. Campbell, and he assured a friend of mine, who gave me the information, that he knew Col. Campbell to be a slaveholder.” There was a double mistake, however. I had not said that Mr. Campbell was not a slaveholder, but that I had been so informed, giving my authority. And I had afterwards, directly from Mr. Campbell himself, the assurance that my information had been correct.

bers of the Whig party, he was retained for three or four years, till he voluntarily resigned for a more advantageous employment.

Through the remainder of my service in Congress, I was not again separated from the Massachusetts delegation in any important vote. I took from time to time as much part in the action of the House as generally falls to the share of inexperienced members. It was my good fortune to introduce and carry a bill making arrangements for the taking of the census of this year, after a bill reported by the Judiciary Committee had proved unsatisfactory. Altogether unexpectedly, I dare say, to others, as well as to myself, I had the laboring oar in that House in defence of the Protective System, on which subject, as a member of the Committee on Agriculture, I presented a report which was the fruit of much labor. The only argument made by any Representative at either session of that Congress, in favor of the reduction of postage to a uniform two-cent rate, was mine. On the 20th and 21st of April, I took a part, which it gratifies me to remember, in that action in the House which broke down an insolent slavedealers' and slaveholders' mob, after it had had its lawless way two or three nights, and established for ever the freedom of the press at the seat of government.*

The Conventions which respectively nominated Mr. Cass and General Taylor as candidates for the Presidency were held in the May and June next following the meeting of the Thirtieth Congress. A convention of delegates from nineteen States, representing citizens who regarded the arrest of the usurpations of the Slave Power as the most important object of public policy, met at Buffalo, the second week in August. Intelligence of its having nominated Mr. Van Buren reached Washington a day or two before the close of the session.

A more painful question than now occurred could scarcely have presented itself to me. I had been in the habit of thinking of Mr. Van Buren as unfavorably as perhaps every Democrat in New England regards Mr. Clay. The idea of supporting him was extremely distasteful to me, and I had written to my friends in Massachusetts that I did not expect to be able to do so in the event of his nomination, which some of them had informed me was, in their opinion, a possible result. I came home, shut myself up almost entirely, and thought over the matter sorrowfully and anxiously for a week.

I could not get away from the conclusion. If I was to do my duty according to my light, it was necessary for me to make every other consideration yield to that of doing the best which the circumstances permitted for the perilled and outraged cause of liberty. In looking at Mr. Van Buren's history, I found that his early and his recent public course had been true to right and freedom. There had been a miserable interval, when, entangled in the meshes of party and high station, he, like all but one of the contemporaries who had stood with him in the foremost rank of American statesmen, had

* A writer in a Whig newspaper of this county, out of the District, represented me as friendly to the claims of slavery, because I voted to give a Virginia member *leave to introduce a bill* providing for the capture of fugitive slaves. Perhaps (for folly is boundless) the writer really did himself believe that I was lending my aid to make the laws on that subject more atrocious than they are. Perhaps he did not know that I voted on this occasion with other Northern antislavery Whigs, of much more consequence than myself, and that our aim was to get into the House, for its debate and action, the subject, which, under the Rules and Orders, I had been prevented from introducing, when I attempted it by a resolution which I had recently offered for the repeal of the law of Feb. 12th, 1793.

yielded to the base expediencies of the time. His worst acts of that description were of a different shade of delinquency from what had been commonly represented, and compared not unfavorably with acts of leading men of the party with which I had always acted. Above all, the great fact stood out broadly, that while Mr. Van Buren, like all the other most prominent statesmen of the country still living, had been too submissive to the Slave Power, he was the only one of them who was man enough to turn from the error of his way, and assume the thankless and thorny championship of the right. It turned out that 291,000 voters in the country, more than one in ten of the whole number, 38,000 voters in Massachusetts, nearly three in ten of the whole number, had determined to make the policy of freedom paramount to every rule of political action. I took care to have my name counted among them.

Before there was opportunity to announce the course which I resolved to take, I received assurances on the part of influential Whig gentlemen of the District, that, if I would but refrain from open opposition to them in the approaching Presidential contest, I should again be nominated by their party for election to Congress. But I could not be silent. I could not consent that any power or inducement on earth should tempt me to withhold such feeble aid as I could give when such a cause as that of the Free Soil party was struggling with such odds.

The Free Soil State Convention was held on the 6th day of September. I was desired to prepare its Address to the electors, and a series of Resolutions. As one of the questions to come before it would be that of a separate nomination for Governor, I declined to do so, or to attend its sitting, on account of my recent relations to Governor Briggs. Subsequently, on its being represented to me that I could confine myself to questions of national politics bearing upon the then approaching Presidential election, I consented to prepare the Address, which received some additions and alterations in the hands of the Convention's committee. I also furnished some of the Resolutions, all, however, relating to the national questions. And at the election which followed, I did not vote against Governor Briggs. Notwithstanding my great regard for him personally, still, in view of the influences by which he allows himself to be swayed, I have always been less clear about the propriety of this than of any other part of my course.

My position being understood, a Whig Convention in the District, and a Democratic Convention, each set up another candidate, while many of my former supporters, with others, honored me with their confidence. In this division of parties, no candidate has obtained a majority of votes, and, after nine trials, the District remains unrepresented. At the second trial, the number of votes cast for me fell short by 43 of the number necessary to effect a choice; on the ninth it fell short by 254. The sixth trial, which took place on the same day with that of State officers in November, was the first at which I failed of having a plurality of votes over each of the other candidates. At that time, 564 more votes were cast for the Whig candidate than for me.

This was generally thought to be owing to an estrangement of some of my former supporters, occasioned by a *coalition* (so called in the hostile newspapers) that had been formed in some of the counties for the choice of State Senators. As things had been going, it seemed certain that the Free Soil party would have no representative in the Senate, as in no county did it outnumber both the others. The same was the case with the Democratic party.

And, by the constitutional provision, the vacant places for counties which had failed to elect would be filled from the two highest lists of candidates, by joint ballot of the two Houses. Under these circumstances, the Democrats said to the Free Soil Convention, — You profess to make all other questions subordinate to that of opposition to the extension of Slave Power. We have prominent men who sympathize with you as to the question which makes the basis of your organization. We will designate such persons as candidates. We will then adopt an equal number of candidates of your proposing, and our united votes shall carry them all into the Senate.

The Free Soil party at first declined, but afterwards entered into the arrangement. They said, — It is important that the cause of Freedom should be represented in the State Senate. We can obtain a representation for it in no other way. And we sacrifice no principle in obtaining a representation for it in this way; for the candidates who are offered us are men worthy of confidence, and more fit for the Senatorial trust than those on the ticket which we shall jointly oppose. And so the arrangement was made, and was successful in the counties of Middlesex and Worcester, within which the Fourth District lies. And, disturbed by the baseness of my privity to this *coalition*, some of my former supporters changed their votes.

Now, though hard words break no bones, and though the word *coalition* (with nothing to qualify it) is soft and innocuous enough, yet one naturally prefers, when the time comes, to be judged with reference to facts as they occurred, rather than to any body's imagination of them. The facts, as to myself, were these. At an early stage of the project I was consulted upon it, by leading gentlemen of my political creed, and I replied distinctly to this effect: — 1. I do not understand you to propose to make my election to Congress a part of the contemplated arrangement, so as that the Democrats shall vote for me on condition of our voting for their Senators; if I did so understand it, I should feel that I had a right to take that question into my own hands, and I should settle it by an immediate withdrawal of my name from the canvas; I would not consent to continue a candidate on those terms.* 2. As to

* The only communication, verbal or written, which I ever had with any Democrat, respecting support from the Democratic party, was in a correspondence, consisting of two letters, one received and one written by me, at Washington, in December, 1848. The tenor of the letter addressed to me may be inferred from my reply, which I subjoin in full. I need give no name. My correspondent will know that the letters passed, and that my copy is correct.

Washington, Dec. 19th, 1848.

MY DEAR SIR, —

Your letter of the 15th reached me yesterday. I thank you for the expression of confidence which it conveys. Since our acquaintance began, in the stormy legislative scenes of 1842 and 1843, though our party associations have been different, you are aware, I believe, that I have not failed to value and reciprocate your friendly regard.

You say that you desire to ascertain "what the Democratic party in this Commonwealth are to expect from me and the party who have sustained me, provided they shall unite with my friends and secure my election."

Pardon me, dear Sir, if, in answer to that part of the question which concerns myself individually, I can only say that I shall cheerfully retire from the place to which my constituents have elevated me, should that prove to be their pleasure; and that, on the other hand, if continued in office, by whosoever votes that result shall be brought to pass, I can only engage to pursue the course which from time to time my best judgment of what is demanded by the public honor and interest shall dictate. What that course may be expected to be, I must rather leave to be inferred from what I have heretofore done and written, than from any professions made on the eve of an election.

the question of an arrangement limited to a joint Senatorial ticket, I have certainly no right to dictate, scarcely to advise; my opinion on that question is worth no more than that of any other citizen in the District; it is not worth so much as that of many, experienced (as I am not) in party action; if I were to be at the proposed Convention, I cannot say that I might not hear arguments for the plan that would satisfy me; but my judgment and my feelings are against it; it is more agreeable to me that we should continue to stand independently on our original principles, and refrain, though at the cost of long defeat, from any thing that might turn out to be an "entangling alliance." I continued so to view the question.

The joint Senatorial ticket was, however, formed in Middlesex, and I voted for it. I did so, without a word of advice or solicitation from any one. Independently of the deference due from me to the decision of my friends on a question of expediency, upon which their judgment was far better than my own, the ticket was the best in the field. Besides being half composed of persons in thorough sympathy with me on political questions, the names upon it represented a larger aggregate than those on either of the other lists, of weight of character and of qualifications for Senatorial business. Setting partisan considerations aside, I defy any man to deny this.

I pursue this course of remark no further. I have not been maintaining the correctness of those political doctrines which, commending themselves to my judgment and conscience, have, from first to last, determined my course. That I have done on other occasions, and may do again. I have now been vindicating, not them, but myself, and showing that I have acted in such a manner as, in faithfulness to them, consistency, integrity, and honor required. And I do not pretend to have taken notice of all the public animadversions of which I may have been made the subject. I dare say that some which I may have seen I have forgotten, and I presume that there have been others which

To that portion of your inquiry which relates to the party that nominated me for the representation of the Fourth District, I am unable otherwise to reply than by referring to the authorized exposition of the principles of that party. I am not qualified to answer for it in any other way. I never aspired to be a party leader, manager, or spokesman. Few men are less conversant with party operations. Respecting the party which has put me in nomination, I have, for myself, no doubt of its having at heart the best honor of the country, and the highest prosperity of all interests in it.

I have not desired to send you a brief, still less a superficial answer, but really I have said substantially all that I could say, if I should enlarge ever so much. I have never made to any party professions of what I would do if raised to office. My repugnance to making such professions is very decided. I can go contentedly into private life, but I cannot do or say any thing to restrict my perfect freedom to act in public station as my sense of duty at the time shall direct.

You avow your aim to be "the greatest good of the greatest number." I accede cordially to what I understand to be the spirit of your remark. But I would alter its terms. "The greatest number" is only the majority. I presume your aim includes the good of the minority also. We both aim at *the greatest good of the whole*.

I will only add that, as to the "moneyed aristocracy" of which you speak, I think with you that its power has of late been most perniciously manifested. In my judgment, that power was brought to bear on the recent Presidential election in our State, in a way which may well give the most serious alarm to every reflecting and patriotic citizen. Nor is my uneasiness on this subject of entirely recent date, as you may see in my pamphlet entitled "Papers on the Slave Power," if you have a copy within reach, — particularly in Nos. 9, 11, 22, and 24, and in the preface to the second edition. I wish I had a copy here to send you.

I shall always be happy to hear from you, and am, dear Sir,

With great respect and esteem,

Your friend and servant.

I never saw or heard of; for, considering what those known to me have been, there is no reason why the like should not have been multiplied to any extent. I see very few newspapers, of late, except from Washington. I was formerly in the habit of reading the two principal Whig daily papers of Boston; one of them constantly for thirty years. But the one I have not seen, except for some such purpose as to look at an advertisement, for more than a year*; nor the other for nearly two years, except on one occasion, when I was told that it had stated that I voted against the usual resolution of thanks to the Speaker on the adjournment of Congress. Living as retired as I do of late, it has sometimes happened to me to hear, for the first time, of some injurious misrepresentation, weeks or months after it has been doing its work.

Shall I venture to suggest that I have found some mitigation of the pain which severe language naturally creates, in supposing that the fiercest reproaches that have assailed me have not been from children of the State which gave me birth, and in which my ancestors have lived from the first hour of its two colonies? Of the three gentlemen connected with the Boston press who have censured me most sharply, I understand one to be from Virginia, one from New Hampshire, and one from Scotland. Of my two fellow-townsmen as prominent as any in opposition, one I learn to be a New Hampshire man, and one a West Indian from Cuba. The opponent who, of all others in the District, has dealt to me the hardest measure, also came among us from New Hampshire. I have always heard him favorably spoken of, as a man of character and good feelings; and I doubt not with great justice, though to me he has certainly been

“A sweet Bell jangled, out of tune, and harsh.”

Of course, the hardest thing to bear in the progress of these transactions has been the loss of old friends. Up to the age of fifty years, I suppose very few men had more; and whether I, on my part, have been constant in friendship, whether I have been easily provoked or alienated in high party times, or in any times, let those who have tried me answer. The little slights and affronts by which the common associates of former days find it suitable to express their disapprobation, are disagreeable, no doubt; but they are not much more.† The change in friends of as many years as make up half the recog-

* While these sheets are passing through the press, another paper falls in my way, in which the following quotation (which I shall verify before this note is printed) is given as an extract from the city paper above referred to, in September last:—

“Mr. Palfrey began his career as a Free-Soiler, by his famous resolution of ‘No union with slaveholders.’ As our present Union, formed by our revolutionary and constitutional fathers, happens to consist of an equal number of slaveholding and non-slaveholding States, what does ‘No union with slaveholders’ mean but ‘Dissolve the Union’? We do not see, starting as he does with *this motto*, why Mr. Palfrey should tell the Abolitionists that he does not agree with them, that a dissolution of the Union is a remedy for slavery. If it is not a remedy for slavery, why proclaim ‘No union with slaveholders’?”

A resolution of “No union with slaveholders” is neither my “famous resolution,” nor my infamous, nor my obscure resolution, nor my resolution at all. I never offered it, in terms or in tenor. The resolution of mine probably referred to is that which I have recited above (p. 9). It seemed, by the best tokens, to be at that time the resolution of Whig Massachusetts; and it should have been, if it was not.

† An instance of the change of sentiment to which I found myself liable, without any thing having occurred to disturb subsisting friendly relations, was the following. There fell in my way, a while ago, a newspaper *editorial*, in which I found myself represented as an “aspiring man of little mind,” as having “earnestly craved Whig support” when I was nominated for

nized term of human life, — the coldness of some, the separation from others, the loud and acrimonious hostility of others, — is not altogether the same thing. It is pretty common for me of late to meet “hard unkindness’ altered eye” in faces which from boyhood before never looked at me but with kindness and smiles. I have been addressed with rude language in the streets, when accosting some old acquaintance. Persons whose youth I tried to serve do not recognize me as we pass. I dare say it is very manly, and all that, to say that one cares nothing about such things. But that is a virtue beyond my mark. I do care for them, probably too much. I care for them so much, that I devoutly thank God that he did not let me know to the full extent what was coming, when I took my course. Had I known it, I hope I should have had the courage to do precisely as I have done. But no man is entirely certain of himself; and had I fully seen what I was incurring, it is possible that I might have flinched. As it is, I am safely past the flinching point. I have made full trial of what can be done upon me in this way, and I find that, though it is a hard thing to bear, still it is a possible one. Health and spirits have stood a shock as violent as any that, from any like cause, will probably try them soon again, and they are left in living and working condition. Fortified and made confident by the trial, as I could have been by nothing else, I am able to assure friends and enemies, that, whether in public or in private station, I expect to do what I think my duty as to public affairs, unmoved by considerations of personal fear or favor. My traducers cannot “defeat” me (as I interpret the word), till they have brought me to some concession; and this I have been led to a pretty strong persuasion that they are little likely to do. And I find myself able to apprise those of my old friends who have done with me, that — well as I have loved them, and how well that was, let them judge — there is not a man of them, whom, if they were mine again, I would not alienate to-morrow, if the price of retaining them was to be a departure from what I take to be right and duty. I am to keep my own respect, at all events. Whether — that point fixed — they will be friends or strangers, is a matter not for me to settle.

It would be very foolish to expect to get at once the satisfactions of independent action and the rewards of compliance. But, by a rule laid deep in the nature of things, it is determined that the former should be far the better of the two. And in my own humble case, they do not stand alone; for I am not only conscious that my much-berated course was an upright one; I have been already permitted to see that it was also very useful. When I trace the present condition and prospects of our Pacific empire to the wide popular movement for Freedom in 1848,* and this in part to the action of the

Congress, and as having been guilty of “Judas-like conduct,” with the addition of other opprobrious language. Above the article stands the editor’s name, and it is the same name which, on the 24th of December, 1847, after the “Judas-like conduct” complained of, namely, my vote in the election of Speaker, was subscribed to a letter of which the following is the concluding sentence: —

“I have many faults, but, if I know my own heart, a lack of gratitude is not among them; and when you count those friends upon whose services you have a just claim, do not, I pray you, omit among the most humble, yet the most devoted,

“Very respectfully, _____.”

* The effect of the Buffalo Convention on the action of the House of Representatives, in August, 1848, was one of the most magnificent results in history. The influence of that series of movements in introducing a free population into California, and the slavery restriction princi-

first session of the Thirtieth Congress, and this again, in part, to the effect of the opening scene of that Congress, I come to the conclusion that some of us did not go to Washington in December, 1847, for nothing; and I shall live and die in the happy belief of having been an humble instrument in the hand of Providence to do something towards saving the vast regions yet to be peopled at the West from the unspeakable shame and curse of slavery.

I am not now writing to the voters of the Fourth District. But some words of Burke to the electors of Bristol are so far applicable to my present purpose, that I will conclude with quoting them.

“And now, Gentlemen, on this serious day, when I come, as it were, to make up my account with you, let me take to myself some degree of honest pride on the nature of the charges that are against me. I do not here stand before you accused of venality, or of neglect of duty. It is not said that, in the long period of my service, I have, in a single instance, sacrificed the slightest of your interests to my ambition, or to my fortune. It is not alleged, that, to gratify any anger or revenge of my own, or of my party, I have had a share in wronging or oppressing any description of men, or any one man in any description. No! the charges against me are all of one kind, that I have pushed the principles of general justice and benevolence too far; farther than a cautious policy would warrant; and farther than the opinions of many would go along with me. In every accident which may happen through life, — in pain, in sorrow, in depression and distress, — I will call to mind this accusation, and be comforted.”

I am, dear Sir,

Faithfully your friend.

ple into its constitution, has been largely and truly set forth in the speeches of Southern members of the present Congress; among others, in those of Mr. Seddon of Virginia and Mr. Clingman of North Carolina, in the early part of the session.

NOTE (see page 14).

THE following Resolves represent the sense of the Commonwealth as expressed by the last General Court held before I went to Washington. They were the certified creed of the State which I represented. The first series were passed February 27th, 1847; the last, April 26th, 1847; which was the last day that the Legislature had been in session before I took my seat in Congress. It would hardly, I thought, have been acting up to the spirit of these Resolves to help give a proslavery organization of Committees to the Congress House of Representatives.

“*Resolved, unanimously*, That the Legislature of Massachusetts views the existence of human slavery within the limits of the United States as a great calamity, an immense moral and political evil, which ought to be abolished, as soon as that end can be properly and constitutionally attained, and that its extension should be uniformly and earnestly opposed by all good and patriotic men throughout the Union.

“*Resolved, unanimously*, That the people of Massachusetts will strenuously resist the annexation of any new territory to this Union, in which the institution of slavery is to be tolerated or established; and the Legislature, in behalf of the people of this Commonwealth, do hereby solemnly protest against the acquisition of any additional territory, without an express provision by Congress that there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in such territory, otherwise than for the punishment of crime.”

“*Resolved*, That the present war with Mexico has its primary origin in the unconstitutional annexation to the United States of the foreign State of Texas; that it was unconstitutionally commenced by the order of the President to General Taylor, to take military possession of territory in dispute between the United States and Mexico, and in the occupation of Mexico;

and that it is now waged by a powerful nation against a weak neighbour, unnecessarily and without just cause, at immense cost of treasure and life, for the dismemberment of Mexico, and for the conquest of a portion of her territory, from which slavery has already been excluded, with the triple object of extending slavery, of strengthening the slave power, and of obtaining the control of the Free States, under the Constitution of the United States.

“ Resolved, That such a war of conquest, so hateful in its objects, so wanton, unjust, and unconstitutional in its origin and character, must be regarded as a war against freedom, against humanity, against justice, against the Union, against the Constitution, and against the Free States; and that a regard for the true interests and highest honor of the country, not less than the impulses of Christian duty, should arouse all good citizens to join in efforts to arrest this war, and in every just way to aid the country to retire from the position of aggression which it now occupies towards a weak, distracted neighbour, and sister republic.

“ Resolved, That our attention is directed anew to the “ wrong and enormity ” of slavery, and to the tyranny and usurpation of the “ slave power,” as displayed in the history of our country, particularly in the annexation of Texas and the present war with Mexico; and that we are impressed with the unalterable conviction, that a regard for the fair fame of our country, for the principles of morals, and for that righteousness which exalteth a nation, sanctions and requires all constitutional efforts for the destruction of the unjust influence of the slave power, and for the abolition of slavery within the limits of the United States.”